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ABSTRACT

For educational delivery systems to meet the needs of special rural populations of minority children, teaching and learning strategies must take into account the three factors of human identity, culture, and ruralness itself. Children who are members of special populations often have an even greater need than most children for recognition, acceptance, and development of self-esteem. Their racial and ethnic culture must be considered and they need to know about their own cultural heritage. Negative prejudices based on race, ethnic origin, and social class status permeate our educational system; these attitudes can damage self concept, sense of environmental control, and students' interest. The individuality of students must be recognized, their respective backgrounds accepted and understood, and building done on the strengths populations the children bring to the classroom. The academic performance of minority children is also hampered by such teacher behavior as using inappropriate curriculum materials and expecting less of the children. These special populations of children frequently come from homes not oriented toward school and educators must devise more creative, imaginative, and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. (The author has a distinctive perspective on the education of special rural populations as he speaks from his own experiences as a minority member, a person raised in the rural South, and as an educator.) (DS)

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# A PERSPECTIVE ON DELIVERING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES TO SPECIAL POPULATIONS -- BLACK AND OTHER MINORITIES

By Kanawha Z. Chavis

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# A Perspective on Delivering Educational Services to Special Populations — Black and Other Minorities

by Kanawha Z. Chavis

"Special populations," as used in this paper, addresses those particular segments of rural school populations that are generally set apart from the mainstream of culture by virtue of race, ethnic origin or socio-economic class.

## INTRODUCTION

In addressing the assigned topic "A Perspective on Delivering Educational Services to Special Populations -- Black and Other Minorities," at least three initial comments are in order. First, I perceive myself as a minority member, as rural and as an educator. Second, I purport no consensus of opinions necessarily held by others who have worked, researched and written in this area. Third, my comments, for the most part, are borne out of my personal day-to-day experiences in rural living: I was born and reared in what was then called "the country." I attended small, rural, elementary schools in the South and graduated from a rural high school in the Southwest; I have taught in a three-teacher rural school; I have served as principal of rural schools; and I have been associated directly with innovative and experimental efforts to improve curriculum, curriculum materials and teacher training for rural school systems at the local, state and regional levels. Hence, I will present a perspective -- one perspective -- my perspective on delivering educational services to special rural populations. This approach, while perhaps limited in a sense, is more suited to my abilities and is, to my thinking, more valuable for this occasion than a more comprehensive and theoretical analysis would be.

James Baldwin in his introduction to The Chasm, by Robert Campbell, states:

> "It is the school that makes vivid to the child his helpless inferiority. It does this by having no respect whatever for the child's experience. Until the child gets to school, his circumstances, however wretched in appearance, however hard in fact, are coherent: in school he discovers that these circumstances are also shameful, so shameful that no one wishes to hear anything about them . . .
>
> . . . There is a brutal efficiency in the means, to say nothing of the speed, with which this debasement of black ghetto youth is accomplished: such matters of efficiency cannot be accomplished by people who do not know what they are doing. They can, however, blind themselves to what they are doing and to such an extent, indeed that many of those most responsible for this devastation are perpetually suggesting ways of aiding the disadvantaged . . ."[1]

I remember when I was a student in a small rural elementary school in North Carolina. My teacher was perceived by both the principal and parents as a good teacher because she had finished four years of college and had a "class A" teaching certificate, something quite rare in rural black schools at the time. In keeping with her training, she felt that all school activities should be educational in some way. We generally started school with our daily devotional period which included the Pledge of Allegience to the Flag, the Lord's Prayer, the Star Spangled Banner, America, and some health song such as "This is the Way We Brush Our Teeth." The interesting fact was that most of us in her classroom had no toothbrush, not to mention toothpaste. Neither were combs, pretty bath cloths and perfumed soap among our household staples.

Being concerned that we become conscious of sound nutrition and health concepts, the walls were covered with colorful posters of balanced meals, including one for breakfast, lunch and dinner. This was somewhat

strange to us in the first place because we were familiar with breakfast, dinner and supper. Semantics notwithstanding, the contents of the meals pictured were different and foreign from our experiences at home.

Not sensitive to this inconsistency, our teacher instituted a period in which she encouraged students to volunteer to share their "breakfast story" every morning following devotions. While there were a few youngsters in the class whose experience afforded them the opportunity to share honestly a breakfast story that was consistent with those impressive posters, most of us were forced by circumstances to embroider the truth or remain silent and be identified as different from our more privileged classmates.

Being unwilling to follow either of these courses, I chose to try to persuade my mother to prepare a breakfast that looked like the one in the poster. Admittedly there were a few minor discrepancies, such as the peanut butter jar I had to substitute for the milk glass, the absence of a knife, fork or napkin, leaving the spoon to serve as the sole eating utensil, and the "tin" china plate. But all things considered, I had done a remarkable job, including helping my mother to marshall the necessary ingredients to place on the table.

With money my brothers and I had garnered from "finding" hen eggs and picking cotton, we walked to the country store to trade our eggs and buy two oranges, a small box of corn flakes, a loaf of "light bread" and a can of Carnation milk. We persuaded my mother to cook a piece of rib side meat, normally reserved for Sunday breakfast, and to fry the eggs whole rather than scrambled.

That morning in class, for the first time, I could hardly wait for the long devotional period to end so that I could tell my breakfast story.

My raised hand was recognized immediately, and I eagerly stood up to recite.

"All right, Kanawha, tell us your breakfast story," said the teacher sweetly, encouraged by her success in my unprecedented participation in the breakfast story.

"I had a glass of milk."

"Very good," she coaxed.

"And I had half an orange."

"Very good."

"I had some cone flakes."

"Cereal," she corrected, "very good."

"And I had an egg."

"Very good."

"I had some light bread toast."

"Just toast. Very good."

"And I had some stric-o-lean, stric-o-fat."

The last statement, unlike the others, was mumbled quickly, and I sat down abruptly, embarrassed by my elevation of rib side meat to the higher status of stric-o-lean, stric-o-fat.

"What?" she asked, leaving me uncertain as to whether she did not understand what I had mumbled or whether I had said something wrong.

"Stric-o-lean, stric-o-fat," I repeated more clearly from my seat.

"What?" she asked again.

"Some side meat," my buddy "Rat" volunteered in a loud voice from the seat beside me.

Encouraged by his support, I stood up again and said, "some hog meat," and pointing to the poster, "some meat like dat on dat pitcher der."

"Oh," she said, enlightened, "You mean pork, or bacon."

I tell this story to illustrate a couple of basic truths that are all too often overlooked by educators working with special populations. Although that teacher ranked high in terms of educational training and certification, she failed seriously in terms of her sensitivity to what was appropriate to develop good self-concept in her pupils, and her understanding of the sub-cultures which were represented by her students. In retrospect, I realize that the teacher had become so steeped in middle class values and vocabulary that she recognized only two words, "pork" and "bacon," for the piece of meat pictured on the poster. While she introduced these two new words to my vocabulary, she simultaneously rejected and ignored the fact that I had come to her classroom already having three words in my vocabulary for the same thing -- "hog meat," "side meat" and "stric-o-lean, stric-o-fat."

APPLICABLE LITERATURE

Based on my modest review of the literature, I would characterize the gap that exists in research and professional literature directly related to the subject of rural public education as scandalous, not to mention the dearth of information on educational needs and resources for special rural populations. Clearly there is much research and literature available on educational theories and practices in general. Likewise, much has been written about the educational needs of special populations in urban settings. However, generalizations or application of this literature and research to special rural populations without some sound basis in direct experience can be misleading, if not totally irrelevant.

I would include among those educators, innovators and scholars who have contributed to research and literature which may be particularly applicable to education and schooling of special rural populations, Ed Weaver, Les Campbell, Nathan Wright, M. Lee Montgomery, Kenneth Clarke, Preston Wilcox, and Norma Jean Anderson, along with Ivan Illich, Paulo Friere, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Jerome Bruner, B.F. Skinner, Mario Fantini and Gerald Weinstein.

The first named grouping of black educators and scholars address the unique educational needs of blacks as a special population from the view of the educator's role, curriculum, teaching and learning environment, special needs of students and proposed major considerations in addressing these needs. Their viewpoints, while addressing delivery of educational services to a single special population, are of value in considering the needs of special rural populations generally.[2]

Illich and Friere, speaking to the education of the poor and disenfranchised, advocate creating a new learning environment where the learner establishes relationships with the teacher and the educational system as a whole such that the school does not have a monopoly on teaching and learning. They maintain that a teacher dominated system of education robs the learner of self respect. Their approaches, while developed from different perspectives, are both based upon a concern for recognizing the dignity and worth of the individual.

Rogers and Maslow and other psychologists and psychotherapists, writing from what is now recognized as the humanistic school of thought, support the notion that the teacher is responsible for encouraging and nurturing the learner's capacity for self-fulfillment, self-esteem, and self-direction. They maintain that the teacher's attitude is significant

in developing the learner's ability to cope with the social environment, and work toward the mastery of skills and knowledge though focusing on the learner's internal developmental needs.

On the other hand, Bruner and Skinner, as behaviorists contend that teaching and learning for the most part should subscribe to objectives that can be clearly stated and measured in terms of behavior. They seem to place less value on the concept of non-structured curriculum and permissive learning environments than do the humanists.

In spite of questions of compatibility of these two schools of thought, they both seem to have relevance to delivery of educational services to special rural populations. Fantini and Weinstein in their book, The Disadvantaged: Challenge to Education, seem to combine essential elements from both schools of thought in a balance which suggests the value of combining the two approaches for effectively addressing the educational needs of special populations.[3]

## "SPECIAL POPULATIONS"

"Special populations" as used in this paper, addresses those segments of rural school populations that are generally set apart from the mainstream culture by virtue of race, ethnic origin or socio-economic status. Thus, we are talking about blacks, Hispanics, native Americans, poor whites, and other minority groups. Within these populations there are additional subgroups comprised of the physically or mentally handicapped. These subgroups require special attention which this paper acknowledges but makes no attempt to address due to limitations of time and space.

It is becoming increasingly important to acknowledge the educational problems facing rural areas as their trend to grow in population continues. In "The New Ruralism," William Ellis points out that all of the seventeen states which have shifted from large out-migration to substantial in-migration since the 1970 census have been rural. Eighteen of the twenty most rapidly growing states are rural, while urban areas are for the most part experiencing increasing out-migration.[4]

Unsafe or unsanitary housing, lack of indoor plumbing, overcrowded living conditions, poor health, inadequate incomes, and lack of transportation facilities are everyday facts of life for the majority of individuals comprising these special populations. Their means of livelihood is generally limited to migrant or seasonal farm work, unskilled farm or day labor, sharecropping, seasonal industrial work or low paying labor in lumbering or other industries specific to given geographic locations.

The social and economic problems that plague these special populations give rise to serious impediments to effective teaching and learning in and of themselves. They are further compounded, however, by problems of ruralness which can also serve to detract from effective teaching and learning.

The question of delivering educational services to these special rural populations must be addressed in the context of the rural setting, with the underlying premise that basic human and cultural identities must be recognized by policy makers and educators alike if their educational needs are to be effectively met. There is an obvious need for educators to recognize and devise more effective teaching and learning strategies which take into account the combined effects, both positive and negative, of these three factors: ruralness, human identity, and culture.

I am reminded of a fourth grade youngster who experienced his first pair of new shoes. Ordinarily aggressive and hostile, one morning this boy arrived at school on his best behavior, volunteering to pick up trash from the floor, erasing the board, sitting attentively in class, and otherwise trying to attract the teacher's attention in a positive fashion. However, the entire morning passed without the teacher taking note of him or, more importantly, his new shoes. At the mid-morning recess the class was instructed to line up to go to the playground. The student complied eagerly in hopes that at least one of the other teachers might notice his new shoes. However, just as the class lined up, it began to shower, and the students were instructed to return to their seats. Frustrated by this act of fate, the lad turned suddenly, and without provocation, let loose on the kid behind him, busting him in the mouth. When the horrified and infuriated teacher, reinforcing the behavior she expected of this student, shoved him against the wall and demanded an explanation, he replied belligerently, "He stepped on my new shoes!"

This story illustrates the importance of recognizing the human and cultural identity of students: children who are members of special populations often have an even greater need for recognition, acceptance, and development of self-esteem. Things often taken for granted by the majority of teachers and students, may be of unrealized importance to individual students who comprise special rural populations.

The aspects of culture must be considered not only in terms of socio-economic culture, as the above story illustrates, but also in terms of racial and ethnic culture. Too often teachers, curriculum planners and textbook publishers ignore the observation of Gwyn Jones-Davis: "the fact

is that the cultural heritage of every American has been beautiful: it is just that most of us know nothing about any heritage except that of the Northern European who was almost the last to get here."[5] Rather they persist in reinforcing traditional stereotypes, thus robbing their minority students of their rightful sense of positive cultural awareness and depriving the members of the majority student body of the opportunity to broaden their understanding and awareness of the total culture in which they live.

## DELIVERING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN GENERAL

In a general sense, the purpose of education includes the development of basic skills and the intellectual development of youth, the development of effective citizenship participation skills, and the enhancement of individual coping abilities to participate in society at large. There are any number of constraints operating in our current educational system that serve to retard the achievement of this purpose, whether we are speaking of rural or urban, majority or minority. On the whole, they might be classified as falling into one of four major categories: lack of consensus among educators regarding basic questions of educational theory pertaining to curriculum, school organization, teaching and learning strategies, and other such issues as decentralization vs. consolidation; financial constraints as imposed by the tax-supported financing of public education; political constraints as reflected in questions of local jurisdiction and its implications for national educational policy and the establishment of national standards; and legislative constraints as reflected in school desegregation and other human rights issues. It is beyond the scope of this paper to

analyze such constraints, as critical as their remedy may be to the question of delivering educational services to special rural populations. Rather it is intended to focus on issues that relate specifically to the improvement of educational services delivery to these populations within the existing structure of our current educational system.

## DELIVERING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES TO SPECIAL RURAL POPULATIONS

If past trends regarding these special populations continue into the future there will be a fast growing population of young people unequipped to participate in the developing rural communities in which they live, not to mention society as a whole. There is much evidence to support the growing contention that the present educational system has failed these populations. This evidence is reflected, among other things, in higher school dropout rates, and lower test scores which purport to measure competency in the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. A general dissatisfaction can be expressed with the state of our knowledge about the life-styles and aspirations of special populations and how to accommodate them in the public school system.

### — Double Jeopardy

Special populations residing in rural areas are under "double jeopardy" by virtue of their ruralness and race. Rural school systems are themselves the victims of bias that too often manifests itself in limited availability of funds, limited highly skilled permanent administrators and teachers, and limited adequate physical facilities. Within the system, educators, administrators and students themselves often have negative

attitudes regarding the value of the rural environment. They are the victims of a "rural inferiority" and "urban superiority" complex.

The existence of negative or racist attitudes regarding special populations is widely recognized. The effect of negative attitudes on learning is well documented, as is the importance of a well developed sense of self-worth. There is growing recognition and acceptance among educators that attitudes of self-concept, sense of environmental control and students' interest in school show strong relationships to achievement. Yet, all of these essential attitudes are critically undermined by a school system that tolerates, much less condones or perpetuates, damaging prejudices among its administrators, faculty or student body.

Barbara Love, in her article, "Desegregation in School: Behavior Patterns That Get in the Way," has identified a number of behavior patterns of educators which detract from effective teaching and learning of minority populations and which are, in my opinion, particularly applicable to special rural populations. These include holding low expectations for the academic performance of minority children, using inappropriate instructional materials, poor interpersonal relationships between teacher and students, failing to value the contributions of minority children, grouping children within the classroom on the basis of factors unrelated to their abilities, biased counseling practices, biased instructional practices, failure to relate to students as individuals, bias in administration of discipline, and lack of honest interaction with students.[6]

Kenneth Clark, in speaking of disadvantaged urban students, also supports the importance of holding high expectations for minority students and treating them accordingly when he states, "the evidence so far strongly

suggests that these children will learn if they are taught and they will not learn if they are approached as if they cannot learn."[7]

-- The Rural Setting

The rural setting offers both strengths and deficits to effective delivery of educational services. It represents a natural learning environment rich in teaching resources but often overlooked. Unfortunately, present curriculum and curriculum materials for rural schools are dominated by the urban influence and not only fail to build upon this learning environment, but subtly undermine its worth in the eyes of rural educators and students alike. The relative physical isolation and impoverished cultural, recreational and social resources of rural areas are "deficits" that have their positive aspects. What seems critical here is to "accentuate the positive," in the words of an old song, and the significance of the negative can be mitigated.

In analyzing the rural setting, we find much that would enhance the educational development of rural special populations. Over the past fifteen years rural communities have experienced a period of accelerated growth as it relates to technology that could be utilized as teaching and learning resources. For example, equipment dealers could be utilized as teaching and learning resources to assist teachers in imparting basic principles of mechanics, physics, etc., by explaining how farm equipment works, why design changes are made, and what problems remain to be solved.

Isolation by distance from museums, sophisticated libraries and other cultural resources is often perceived as a disadvantage in rural

areas, while the natural environment is ignored as a "living laboratory" to be used by rural educators. Emphasis seems to be placed on instructing or exposing students to "exotic" experiences, such as field trips to distant airports, while disregarding their need to be able to understand and utilize the everyday mechanisms of community services and the institutions which provide them. Yet the relationship of the real, everyday experiences of students to the curriculum and its presentation is the very factor that can make teaching and learning effective for these students.

One of the startling observations I made while administering an innovative and experimental statewide program in North Carolina was the lack of such relationships in the classroom in what was perceived as a "model" program. I recall the difficulty I had in one pre-school program I observed, in persuading the teachers that the play environment they had created for the students, while "cute," was not only unrelated to the real life experiences of their students, but that it was actually damaging to their self-concept and sense of self-esteem. Specifically, this school was located in a lumbering and agricultural community where most of the students came from low income families and lived in homes that lacked modern facilities. Yet the play area was equipped with toy stoves, sinks, and dishwashers; the "dress-up box" was filled with evening gowns, top hats and tails, and briefcases; and the toy shelf was filled with fancy cars, buses and airplanes. There was a conspicuous absence of trucks, tractors, coveralls, hard hats, work shoes, dishpans, washtubs and other paraphernalia that would make the child feel that his way of life was in any way "normal" or acceptable.

— Human and Cultural Identity

In a similar regard, the direct personal problems and experiences of special population students must be recognized and acknowledged in the classroom, and taken into account in curriculum planning and presentation. We must re-examine the value and implications of what are normally considered "typical" and "acceptable" practices from the viewpoint of the human and cultural identity of special population students.

Upon being named principal of a small rural elementary school, it was carefully explained to me that escalated discipline problems, including theft in the school, could be expected in this particular school starting around mid-November and running through early spring. This would be accompanied by a high incidence of desertion of families by fathers, and child abuse in the home. All of this was attributed to the fact that the youngsters who worked in the fields during the planting, growing and harvesting seasons would return to school during this period, simultaneously decreasing family income and increasing overcrowding in the classroom. In short, there was nothing I could do to prevent it.

When I instituted a policy of prohibiting all holiday activities in the classroom except those that could be related solely to in-school resources, I met with immediate protest from my teachers and even some parents of a more middle class persuasion. Adamantly I insisted: no more Halloween costume parties; no more Thanksgiving Day parties where students were encouraged to talk about the meals that would be served; no more exchanging gifts at Christmas, or reciting "what I did" or "what I got" for Christmas in the classroom. No more show and tell about the Easter Bunny. Instead, teachers were instructed to allow children to make any

decorations or gifts in the classroom with school materials, or do without. The only holiday activities to be discussed would be those sponsored in the school.

Student behavior in the classroom and the way in which holidays were observed in the school were, in my judgement, clearly related. Admittedly, other changes were instituted which may have addressed the behavior of students in the school, but fights and other school discipline problems, including theft, were reduced by 50% in the first year and over 90% in the second year of the new holiday policy. Although innocently instituted in the name of "education," these practices in many instances had driven students and even parents to go to great extremes in an attempt to either comply with the "norm" or compensate for their inability to comply with hostile or other inappropriate behavior.

Volumes have already been written about the "disadvantaged child" and the "culturally deprived" or "culturally disadvantaged." These euphemisms for blacks or other racial, ethnic or socio-economic class minorities convey in some way that the child is somehow deficient or at fault, and must be brought up to acceptable standards. Myriad special programs have been initiated, with varying degrees of success, to improve the achievement of such "special populations," ranging from team teaching to mainstreaming, from "Headstart" to "Upward Bound." Yet we hear repeatedly that these programs do not work effectively. Why not?

-- Strengths and Deficits

A notion which I have developed regarding categories of students which makes sense to me and addresses this question is that of student orientation, as determined by the student's personal experiences. Youngsters, in my

opinion, fit into one of three categories when they enter school: 1) school-oriented pupils (SOPs); 2) non-school-oriented pupils (NSOPs); or 3) anti-school-oriented pupils (ASOPs). I would point out that I say school oriented, not learning oriented, for I maintain that all pupils are learning oriented but that their orientation may not be compatible with "learning" in the traditional school setting. SOPs are groomed in the home to value the same things that are valued in the school setting. They know their numbers, alphabet, colors, nursery rhymes, etc. In short, they are a teacher's delight. NSOPs are rewarded in their homes for responsible behavior that contributes to the family welfare, but they are not as sensitive to the demands that will be placed upon them in the school environment. They accept authority and generally follow the instructions of the teacher but they lack an appreciation for abstract learning. They are often perceived and labeled by teachers as slow learners or retarded, not because the facts support this but because the teacher judges them against a foreign criteria. ASOPs are generally from families where parents themselves have experienced the school as a hostile atmosphere, and school is used as a threat to enforce compliance or acceptable behavior at home. Such children are generally perceived as behavior problems in the classroom and may even be tagged as mentally or emotionally disturbed.

While these categories may hold true for all socio-economic classes or racial or ethnic groups, it seems reasonable to conclude that special rural populations more frequently fall into the latter two categories of NSOP and ASOP. This makes it doubly important that educators take particular care to devise more creative, imaginative and innovative approaches to teaching and learning utilizing all available resources.

This notion can be illustrated with one last story about a first grader and his experiences as a new student. He was assigned to the classroom of one of our "best" new teachers who held a Masters degree in elementary education and had twelve years teaching experience in rural schools. Being a "highly qualified" teacher, she had previously enjoyed the advantage of teaching SOPs, with whom she proved very successful. NSOPs or ASOPs who had the misfortune to be assigned to her class were routinely disposed of by going to the principal and reporting the child as being mentally or emotionally unfit for her class.

In this instance, one of her students was a boy who came from a family which attended church almost nightly; virtually every social experience of this child was centered around various church meetings which he attended with his parents. I would classify this child as an NSOP. Upon entering school, he acted out the only kind of social exchange and interaction with which he was familiar in a group setting. He preached, prayed, passed the collection plate and threatened the teacher with Hell's fire if she didn't listen to the words of the Lord. Unable to control his behavior in the classroom, the teacher sat him on a chair outside the door to the playground, justifying her action on the grounds that she could not keep him from disrupting her classroom any other way.

Reluctantly, I transferred this student to another teacher who, although less "qualified," conducted her class on the basis of a sound knowledge of each student as an individual. Upon taking this child into her class, she immediately made him responsible for conducting the devotional period. He quickly understood that after "church" was over everybody had to go to "work" and "disruptive" behavior disappeared. He remained a good

student and respected leader throughout his school years. Today he is a successful attorney with a prominent law firm, having graduated with honors from college and law school.

This is but one example of the critical importance of recognizing the individuality of students, of understanding and accepting the background from which they come, and of building on the strengths they bring to the classroom rather than interpreting all behavior in the context of preconceived deficits. It is essential to recognize that differences are not necessarily deficits, and differences, when approached with a positive attitude can often be interpreted as strength. As Armando Rodriquez pointed out in his paper, "The Mexican American -- Educational Profile '70," educators must recognize the cultural richness of the culturally different. Just as there is economic strength in diversity, so is there strength in human diversity, and we do a disservice not only to the child, but also to ourselves and to society at large by failing to recognize that fact.[8]

Research does provide some direction here, but it is more comfortable to ignore it. It is less threatening to treat the symptoms than the cause of the problem: negative prejudices based on race, ethnic origin, and social class status permeate our educational system, and until honestly and effectively dealt with, will continue to undermine the effectiveness of any "remedial" or "special" program, no matter how brilliantly conceived or competently administered. Schools must develop the capacity to cope with differences among students, not stubbornly strive to erase those differences. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that a positive self-concept is critical to successful learning, that teacher attitudes and expectations regarding

their students are more compelling variables than class size, per pupil expenditure, extracurricular programs, remedial education or any number of other factors. Clearly these can enhance learning, but they cannot do so in a setting of non-acceptance of the individual student as an individual of merit and worth.

Thus, the need to recognize, acknowledge and build upon the strengths of minority experiences in order to overcome the negative consequences society has imposed upon minority membership becomes critical. Only in this context will any further "improvements" in the interest of delivering educational services to "special populations" be effective. As it relates to rural areas, there are a number of techniques that might be developed and implemented to make more effective and creative use of available time, talent and technology to enhance educational effectiveness once this basic attitudinal problem is addressed.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In considering the delivery of educational services to special rural populations, it is easy to criticize existing structures or approaches for shortfalls of one respect or another. It is harder to develop and implement more viable options. Yet that is the challenge we must accept.

In order to provide effective educational services for special rural populations we must start with teacher preparation, which must not be perceived in the narrow sense of teacher training for certification as prescribed in university pre-service teacher programs. Rather it must include continuous and ongoing in-service training programs.

Teachers of special rural populations need additional training and

experience in more effective utilization of available time, talent and technology. Not only must they maximize utilization of their own time and talents, but also that of their students who bring individual resources into the classroom, and of community residents who can also contribute to the learning environment. Technological advances should also be utilized more extensively to enhance the quality of the learning environment.

Training assistance must further be provided in the difficult area of helping teachers, administrators and counselors to learn to relate to all students as individual human beings, recognizing and respecting their personal and cultural differences. Given this foundation, they will be more effective in devising relevant teaching and learning strategies that enhance the learning environment.

Educators must overcome the attitudes that schooling is perceived as something of merit and worth by all students, or even by all parents. They must realize that they have a responsibility to make this value real for their students, and consider the possibility that the failing is theirs' rather than the student's when students do not recognize schooling as a valuable experience. It is unreasonable to expect students and parents as consumers of a public service to eagerly solicit exposure to irrelevant, inappropriate or degrading learning experiences. When negative learning experiences directed against a student outweigh positive learning experiences as perceived by the teacher, it is only natural that the overall merit of the learning experience is diminished. Hence, educators must look at themselves not only as deliverers of educational services but also as promotors, salesmen, managers and technicians.

The importance of teacher training to improve rural education is recognized in "Increasing the Options," a Report of the Task Force on Southern Rural Development, when increased attention to the training of educational professionals is identified as a vital major reform.[9]

Given the diverse nature of our overall public education system, with responsibility and power reserved by the fifty states, it is appropriate to consider what actions might be taken on the federal, state and local levels to facilitate implementation of such training programs, along with other appropriate actions to enhance effective delivery of educational services to special rural populations. We can no longer delay dealing with the questions of how to effectively deliver meaningful educational services to special populations in the name of equal opportunity. Over the last twenty-five years, since the Brown decision, we have invested considerable energy into assuring equal educational opportunity for minorities or special populations. Many of these issues regarding equal opportunity remain unresolved. It is time to get on to questions of equal educational achievement. In short, we must now move from the age of opportunity to the age of achievement in every sense of the word.

- A first step to be taken on the national level in the area of public policy is that of declaring that special rural populations have unique characteristics and educational needs, and accordingly demand special consideration. Among such special considerations might be the allocation of monetary support for special impact areas or for other appropriate programs such as the one described below.

- A second step to be taken on the national and regional levels might be the establishment of a National Rural Education Institue and Research Center, charged with overall responsibility for supporting the improvement of rural educational services, including delivery of educational services to special rural populations. Such an institute would include the following areas of responsibility and/or activity:

  1) Foster, encourage and conduct research activities related to the education of special rural populations;
  2) Sponsor and support, including funding, of innovative, experimental and demonstration programs aimed at improving delivery of educational services to special rural populations;
  3) Collaborate with teacher educational institutions to improve pre-service teacher training regarding education of special rural populations;
  4) Collaborate with state departments of education and local school systems in developing and implementing in-service training programs for teachers of special rural populations;
  5) Serve as a clearinghouse to collect and disseminate information regarding effective projects, programs, methods and materials for servicing special rural populations.

6) Sponsor and/or support special institutes on the national, state and regional and local levels, for the purpose of encouraging the exchange of ideas and identification of problems and workable solutions regarding education of special rural populations; and

7) Review existing education legislation and legislation regarding related supportive services and make recommendations for appropriate modifications or additions that would more directly address the needs of special rural populations.

- On the state and local levels educators are urged to institute policies and mechanisms that would make the educational process more responsive to the needs of special rural populations including the following:

  1) Employ members of special populations in administrative positions within school systems;

  2) Involve parents, through the use of advisory councils of other formalized structures, in the planning, development, administration, and evaluation of programs and policies affecting special rural populations;

  3) Utilize indigenous minority members in para-professional and instructional support roles within the school system;

  4) Incorporate the history and cultures of special populations into the curriculum as a means of fostering a

positive self image among special population students and increased acceptance and understanding among the student population as a whole;

5) Reject textbooks and other curriculum materials that project an urban bias or which fail to present various sub-cultures as valuable components of our total history and national culture;
6) Utilize local community resources as a supplement to the educational program to help students relate meaningfully to their school and their community;
7) Utilize the rural environment as a "living laboratory"; and
8) Seek out and utilize the resources individual students bring to the classroom as a valuable asset.

In closing I would make two final observations, which I direct particularly to those who are in a position to make or influence policy decisions. First, I would point out that policy should be viewed as whatever governing bodies, on whatever level, chose to do or not to do. Inaction can have as great an impact as action. The concept of "benign neglect" is, unfortunately, not a new one, and we must take care that we are not guilty of it whether by intent or by default.

Secondly, public policy is often formulated in response to pressure by special interest groups. Historically, this has been particularly true as regards public education, as evidenced in such issues as desegregation, national aid to education, and publicly supported parochial schools. In considering the educational needs of special rural populations we must be constantly aware that special rural populations, by their very nature,

are essentially unorganized, and have no special interest groups to represent them on the policy-making level. Thus, it is incumbent upon us to seek out those indigenous rural leaders and other minority representatives who may be in a position to direct our thinking along lines that will enable us to impact upon public policy in a responsive manner.

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